

Preface

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Mr. Reed and I set out for New Guinea in the summer of 114
1936. We received extremely valuable practical help from
Professor Hogbin at Sydney, and eventually arrived at
Kwoma on October first. Mr. Reed collaborated with me
until the end of February, when his project took him on a
survey of the tribes of the Sepik area. I remained at Kwoma
until the end of April, when I felt that, although my work
was not complete, a period of diminishing returns had set in.

We used the usual techniques employed by anthropologists 120
who work with the culture of a living society, combining par-
ticipant observation with the questioning of informants. We
kept a daily record of the events which occurred in the ham-
let and of the happenings in other hamlets when we were able
to observe them or were told about them. This record was
scanty at first, but as our knowledge of the people and the
culture grew the daily reports became fuller, until toward
the end of our stay they contained some of our best infor-
mation.

We also followed anthropological practice in establishing 123
the reliability of our data, checking all statements with as 124
many informants as practicable. In participant observation
we employed a special criterion for discovering whether an
act which we observed was customary or deviant. We found
that if the act was customary, it would evoke no critical
comment from those members of the society who observed
it. On the other hand, if the act deviated from custom, the
comments of those who observed it would reveal this fact.
Thus, by paying especial attention to the spectators and re-
cording their comments when an event occurred, we were
usually able to determine whether or not an act was custom-
ary by the observation of a single instance.

The nature of the Kwoma settlement made our fieldwork 114
difficult. The dwellings were loosely clustered in small ham- [361]
lets of ten or a dozen houses each, so that it was impossible
to find any vantage point from which to observe the life of
the tribe as a whole. A further obstacle was the precipitous [33]
nature of the mountain on which the Kwoma lived. This